

The Alpha's Promise

Epilogue (Bonus Chapter)

Melissa set the grocery bag of snacks she'd packed next to the cooler by the front door and did another sweep of their place, straightening up. They were headed to Estes Park for the shifter games his father's pack hosted, and she wanted to leave the place neat.

True to his word, Cody had let her redecorate his place and she loved it now, almost as much as she adored the house he was remodeling for them. She'd been reluctant to spend too much money on the new interior, but Cody had given her a budget and insisted she use it all. From the day he'd marked her, he treated her like a legal spouse, adding her to his checking account, as an officer of the CJ Steele Corporation, and putting her name on the deed to their new house. Though things were still new and half the time she worried she was crazy, she'd decided to jump in with both feet, just like Cody.

And their first month as mates had been idyllic—until today.

Right now, Cody was still out in the garage, doing God knew what, even though he'd told her they needed to be on the road by 2 p.m. and it was already pushing 3 p.m. He'd been a bear all day, snapping at her for asking too many questions about the games, or even what to bring. She feared he had second thoughts about bringing her up there to meet his family. If they were anything like him, they'd have a bias against her for being mostly human.

She pushed the door open to find him rearranging supplies on his shelves. "Are you ready?"

He whirled and glared at her. "Not quite." His tone was beyond snappish, it was scathing, as if he couldn't believe she'd asked such a question.

She tightened her lips. "Look. I know you're uptight about seeing your dad again, but if this is how you're going to be all weekend, I'm not going up there with you. I can stay here and keep my head on its shoulders where it belongs."

He stared at her, a muscle ticking in his jaw. "Come here."

Her insides squelched. The previous times he'd issued that order had been followed by punishment. But he'd also promised he'd never punish her without her agreement, and she definitely didn't agree with it now. She marched over and stood in front of him, hands on her hips.

The corners of his mouth twitched, like he found her rebellion cute. He grasped her nape with one hand and pulled her flush against his body, dropping his face into her hair. "I'm sorry," he murmured.

Her shoulders relaxed and she melted into his embrace. "We don't have to go," she said, again.

"No, we should go. We might find out something about your grandfather from the Wyoming pack."

"They're not going to like me, are they?"

He stiffened and pulled away to look at her. “Why would you say that?”

She swallowed. “It’s true, isn’t it? They won’t like that you mated a human. Your pack can barely stand it—your family will hate it.”

His eyes slid away from hers and she knew she was right. A twisting knot formed in her stomach.

When his focus returned to her, his expression was set in hard, determined lines. “The first thing you need to know is that I’m not going to allow anyone to belittle my mate. If anyone slights you, I will rip them to shreds. If there’s any arguments or altercations, don’t get involved. There’s going to be a lot of things you don’t understand—customs and culture. I need you to stick close to me and follow my lead, understand?”

She nodded.

“I mean it. If you get in the middle of something, I will turn savage to protect you. I won’t be able to help myself. And I’d rather not kill or maim one of my family members.”

She shivered and he pulled her close again. “Don’t be scared, baby. I’ll take care of you.”

“Just don’t make me the enemy, too, okay?”

“I’m sorry.” He kissed the top of her head.

She reached for the button on his jeans. “Maybe I can take the edge off.”

“Fuuuck, baby,” he groaned, his cock hardening when she rubbed her hand over it. She lowered the zipper and released his length, lowering to her knees.

“Wait—” He pulled her up. “Not in here.” With a quick scoop, he lifted her to straddle his waist and carried her into the house. They didn’t make it far, though. He pressed her back against the closest wall. Her short skirt had ridden up to her waist and his cock pressed against her core, with just the thin gusset over her satin panties between them.

Cody’s eyes flashed light blue and he growled, shifting her weight to move the fabric.

“Don’t rip them,” she begged. He’d ruined so many pairs of her panties over the past month, it was a wonder she ever had any to wear.

He closed his eyes, as if bringing his beast back into control, and only yanked them to the side, rather than all the way off. With one thrust, he was inside her, swallowing her cry with a fierce kiss.

“Oh baby,” he groaned, shoving up and into her, staring down into her eyes with fierce intent. “I’ll never get enough of being inside you.”

She couldn’t voice her agreement, because her eyes were already rolling back in her head as the pleasure and intensity of his possession consumed her.

Cody thrust into her again and again until lights exploded behind her eyes and she came, muscles clamping down on his cock. Her climax spurred his finish. He shouted and cursed, then drove in balls deep and stayed buried inside her as he came. He closed his eyes and leaned his forehead against hers as both their bodies went slack, hers still pinned against the wall.

His eyes flew open. “It’s been more than a month since I met you and you haven’t had a period.”

A slow smile stretched across her face. "I know."

He pulled out and dropped her to her feet, straightening her skirt. "You know? What do you know?"

She shrugged. She'd wanted to wait until they were in Estes Park to tell him, but maybe it was better this way, while he was still relaxed. "I took a test."

"And—?"

She smiled.

To her shock, he blinked back tears. Her fierce, dominant alpha shifter actually had moisture in his eyes. "Are you having my pup? My baby?"

"Yes."

Cody drew a deep breath through his nose with his eyes closed, as if trying to corral his emotions. "Baby..." he croaked. "I'm so happy. Are you?"

She nodded, letting her love for him shine from her gaze.

"Come on, beautiful girl. I can't wait to show you off up there."

Cody turned down the dirt drive leading to his father's enclave, an eleven cabin dude ranch at 9,000 feet in elevation. His stepmom had saved a two-bedroom cabin for him, which they would share with Ben and Ashley. His pack would arrive in the morning, pitching tents near his cabin.

He parked, smiling at the rush of children gathered around the vehicle—his nieces and nephews, who had grown impossibly large since he last saw them.

"Uncle Cody," squealed Hannah, his older brother's eleven-year-old. She was his oldest niece.

"Hannah Rose, you're as tall as your mom, by now, aren't you?"

She squeezed his middle tight. "Not quite. Mom says by next year I will be. We almost wear the same shoe size."

He pulled the half dozen other nieces and nephews in for hugs, as well, introducing them to Melissa, who had thoughtfully brought them each a gift. The kids snatched them up, instantly won over by her. The smile she sent him made him catch his breath. So beautiful. He'd been working on keeping it on her, and other than his fuck up today, had found it easy.

She was not the stuck up snob he'd assumed her to be when they met—nothing close to it. Underneath that haughty exterior lay unparalleled sweetness. Devotion. Submission. He'd worked hard to prove himself a worthy mate and she'd matched him in service, giving all of herself back to him.

She was a perfect mate.

He handed a smaller bag to Jackson, his oldest nephew, and carried the rest of them into the cabin, himself.

Melissa's eyes lifted to the clouds glowing pink and purple behind Twin Peaks, lit up by the setting sun. "It's beautiful here. This is where you grew up?"

"Yep." He tried to see it through her eyes, instead of tainted by his memories of his father's dictatorial rule. The majestic Rockies, the brilliance of green pine trees against the expanse of blue sky.

A black SUV turned onto the dirt road and he waved, to show Ben where to park.

"Grandpop said to tell you all to come to Wolf Hall once you're settled in. The pack from Wyoming is here and they're having a potluck in there," Hannah informed him.

He took the cooler out of Melissa's hands, giving her ass a smack for even trying to carry it. "Okay, we'll be down in just a bit, kiddo. Tell them to save us some food. Why aren't you all there?"

"We already ate," Hannah called over her shoulder as she and the other kids raced down the incline toward Wolf Hall.

He and Melissa waited to help Ben and Ashley unload, and then the four of them walked down to the hall together.

The needle didn't exactly slide off the record when they walked in, but she and Ashley got a lot of looks, ranging from curious to downright suspicious. Ben, who never appeared friendly, wore a glower that would ward off even the friendliest strangers, so they ate at a table alone, while Cody made the rounds, greeting his family and acquaintances.

She told Ashley of Cody's warning to lie low, and Ben concurred, saying he wouldn't be letting either of them out of his sight, and he didn't want them to mingle.

She wanted to help Cody, knowing it was difficult for him to be there, but her presence only made things worse for him. She and Ashley spent their time, instead, studying every white-haired male who appeared to be their Grandma's age, wondering if their grandfather was here.

After the meal, the shifters spilled out into the night air, standing in little groups conversing. She and Ashley and Ben leaned against the split log fence, waiting for Cody to emerge.

"Who brought the humans?" An older male nearby asked. Whether he didn't see them there or didn't care, she wasn't sure.

The grizzled male he spoke to knew they were there, though. His gaze flicked to them before he answered gruffly, "They're mated to alphas, both of them. One to the leader of the Denver pack and the other to the one in Colorado Springs."

Cody's father.

"Your son's?" The question lacked any emotion inflection.

“My youngest, Cody Jackson. Made a pack out of nothing down on there, all on his own.” There was no mistaking the pride in his voice and it hit Melissa like a log to the chest. Did Cody realize he’d impressed his father? Somehow she doubted it.

“Where are they from?”

“Who? The humans? I’m not sure. I understand they have shifter blood in them. That’s what allowed them to be mated.”

The old man stilled, then slowly swiveled to stare right at them, confirming her earlier belief that he’d known they were there.

Melissa started toward him, but Ben caught her arm. “What did your mate say?” he murmured in a low voice. “Wait for him.”

Cody appeared, as if summoned, his huge brawny form silhouetted in the doorway. It only took him a second to take in the scene, then he strode over and clapped the old man on the back. “Flint, I’d like to introduce you to my mate.”

Without looking at Cody, the man called Flint stepped toward them, eyes flicking from her face to her sister’s and back again. The moon lit his face as he drew near and she gripped her sister’s hand and squeezed tightly. The resemblance to their father was uncanny.

“This is Melissa, my mate, her twin Ashley, and Ben Stone, from Denver. We’re hoping to solve a little mystery while we’re here this weekend. Maybe you can help.”

Flint made an indistinguishable sound, still staring at her and her sister.

“You see, their grandfather was a shifter from the Cheyenne area. He left their grandmother before he knew she was pregnant. Their father was raised by a human and never shifted.”

Flint let out a sound like a moan or a sob and stumbled closer, reaching out to grasp Melissa’s arm.

She winced at the bruising grip, but the look of shocked anguish on the man’s face quelled any protest she might have offered.

“Easy,” Cody growled and pried his fingers off her.

“Jane?” His voice strained at the word. “Was that your grandmother’s name?”

“Still is,” Ashley said softly, hooking a hand through Flint’s elbow.

Melissa took the other side. “Would you like to go inside and talk?”

“Yes. Yes, I would.”

Cody and Ben trailed behind at a distance, letting them lead the old shifter back into Wolf Hall where they settled at a table.

“My name is Jebb Flint.” He held out his hand.

“Melissa Bell.”

“Ashley Stone.” They each shook his palm.

He shook his head, shock making him look far older than he’d initially appeared. “She married a human,” he said faintly. “I always thought the child was his.”

“She left the father’s name blank on the birth certificate. Our father found out when he went to college. She wouldn’t tell him who his real father was, though.”

Jebb appeared devastated. “She replaced me quickly,” he croaked. “I was glad. Thought maybe her heart wasn’t as broken as mine. But she had to, didn’t she? Or else she’d be shunned when the baby came. I don’t suppose she ever forgave me.”

“I don’t know. You could ask her yourself. She’s still in Cheyenne.” Ashley shoved a lock of hair back from her face.

“You two look just like her, you know.” His face softened.

“You look like our dad.”

Pain flitted across his features. “And your father?”

“He doesn’t know about shifters. He’s an air traffic controller in Dallas.”

Jebb looked down at his gnarled hands. “Do you need anything?”

Melissa smiled and glanced at Ben and Cody, who stood leaning against the wall nearby. “No. We are both well cared for.”

Jebb stood, as if just realizing they were there. He pumped both the men’s hands. “Two alpha grandsons. I couldn’t be more delighted. Your father’s proud of you, you know,” he said to Cody, who appeared taken aback.

She stood and ducked under his arm, standing close. “It’s true,” she said softly. “I heard the way he spoke about you to others.”

Cody worked to swallow and gazed toward the door, where his father had just appeared. He lifted his chin and his father sauntered over, hands stuffed in his pockets.

“Jack, looks like we just became family,” Jebb said to Cody’s father.

Jack raised his eyebrows.

“Your son’s mate happens to be one of my granddaughters.” His smile included Ashley, too.

Jack’s gaze swiveled to Melissa, appraisingly. “Is that so?” He stuck out his hand. “I’m Jack. I expect Cody would’ve gotten around to introducing us at some point.”

She squeezed Cody’s arm, willing him not to take offense to the underlying criticism there.

“I wasn’t sure what reception our mates would receive, to be honest,” Cody said, levelling a challenging stare at the older man, whose face looked so similar to his own.

Ben stepped up a little closer, showing his support for Cody.

“I’m Melissa,” she said brightly as the older man crushed her hand in his. “This is my sister, Ashley, and her mate, Ben.”

Jack looked like he wanted to say something, but then changed his mind. After a pause, he said simply, “You’re all welcome here. Your packs, too.” He turned to Cody. “You, too, son.”

Cody flinched slightly, like he wasn’t ready for his father to talk about their long ago quarrel. She tightened her grip around his waist and he looked down, his expression softening.

Cody cleared his throat. “That’s good, because Melissa’s carrying my pup, and I’ll want him to know his cousins.”

Ashley squealed, shooting her sister a half-thrilled, have remonstrative look. “How long?” she demanded.

“Hardly at all. Just a week late.” Melissa radiated the love and serenity pregnant females always seem to have.

Once more, Cody had to blink back tears of joy. Ben pumped his hand and thumped him on the shoulder, as did Jebb. He looked over at his father and was shocked to see the same tears shining in his eyes.

“That’s great, son.” His father’s voice sounded choked. His old man had never been a touchy-feely kind of guy, but he moved in like he wanted to embrace.

Cody turned and accepted his stiff, awkward man-hug.

Soon he’d have his own pup—he’d probably make mistakes as a parent, too. He swallowed around the knot in his throat. Maybe Melissa was right.

It was time to forgive.

He drew her close again and dropped a kiss on the top of her head. “I love you, baby.”

The shocked pleasure in her expression made him kick himself. Had he not told her yet?

Their gathered family members politely drifted toward the door, giving them space.

“I love you,” he repeated firmly.

She flashed a dazzling smile that made his insides squeeze. “I love you, too, Cody Steele.”

He closed his eyes, savoring the smell of her hair, the tingle that always flushed his skin when it came in contact with hers, the almost painful expansion in his chest.

The irony that he had, indeed, mated a human, and fulfilled his father’s taunting prophecy when he’d banished him from the pack made him smile. A lifetime mated to Melissa was hardly a punishment.

No, he was the luckiest wolf on the mountain, as far as he could see...